



ALERT

News from the UFMCC
on AIDS Legislation, Education, Research and Treatment.

November 1993

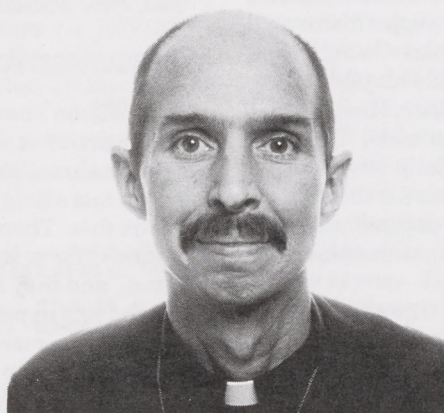
Completing the Cycle: A Celebration of Life

On Sunday, September 26, Rev. Elder Nancy Wilson stood in the pulpit of MCC Los Angeles, and announced the retirement, due to AIDS, of Rev. Dan Mahoney as Assistant Administrative Pastor of the church. Rev. Mahoney will continue as Assistant Pastor, even though he will no longer be in charge of administration. Rev. Wilson states, "I want him to define the job now. I've asked him to start speaking to groups in the church about what he's going through. As Rev. Jim Mitulski says, 'If you can't fix it, feature it!'"

Rev. Mahoney summarizes the situation like this: "I've got a wonderful job with a wonderful boss, with a body that's not willing anymore. And it's real difficult to let go, especially when you still have your mental facilities. The physical ability to keep up with the job is just not there." Dan feels that this situation has been brought on by the onset of tuberculosis, painful peripheral neuropathy, and the general wear and tear of the disease itself.

The process of making this decision, and informing the staff, the board of directors, and the church, began when Dan was hired in November 1990 with the full knowledge that he was living with AIDS. Nancy relates, "We'd had a board member who had died of AIDS the previous fall, and he had been in tremendous denial. It was horrible and painful, and as a result there was a lot of HIV phobia on the board of directors."

When Dan candidated, Nancy reports there was a lot of "weeping and gnashing of teeth" on the board. She intentionally allowed the emotional reactions, but went on to talk about the time when he might become ill, and how they would handle that. "It was agreed that he and I would work on adjusting his schedule as needed. We wanted him to work in a way that wouldn't jeopardize his health. So we talked about a number of possibilities, including hospitalizations and retirement.



Rev. Dan Mahoney

We made a contract for Dan that we reviewed every year. When it came to his being sick or disabled, we'd just keep renegotiating the contract."

Dan recalls, "You don't know the emotion that welled up when they invited me to become a part of the staff. What a vote of confidence and what a statement of faith! Nancy and the board of directors spent months struggling over this issue."

Anyone who knows Dan Mahoney knows the deep, abiding commitment which he shares with his partner in life, Patrick Weisenburger. Although Dan has known his HIV status since 1985, Patrick did not discover he was positive until after they had moved to Los Angeles. Nancy Wilson says, "Dan and Patrick came as a package. We took on the responsibility of being family to them. We worked very hard at finding them housing, and finding them family and friends."

Ever since his hiring, Dan has been a greatly loved and hugely helpful member of the staff at MCC Los Angeles. When he first approached Nancy Wilson about the job, he described himself as "the little guy who comes behind the circus with a broom." Nancy recalls, "We needed a pretty big broom." The former Assistant Pastor had

been terminated, so there was no staff aside from Nancy, and the situation in the church office was pretty bleak.

Rev. Mahoney has made a tremendous difference in organizing the life of the church. Former Board member Dave Martin remembers, "In Dan's initial interview, he said, 'I don't believe in giving second-best for Jesus,' and he's always come through. He's reliable, and he works until the job's done. The church office become more organized, and communication improved drastically."

Rev. Wilson shares, "Dan and I grew to love and know each other in many ways. He's my Radar O'Reilly: he can read my mind. Thinking about replacing him, ... well I'll never be able to replace him. He has a wonderful, self-reflective humor. He's humble and smart, and sets goals for himself."

Dan and Nancy both speak of how extraordinary their relationship has become: Dan says, "Nancy's my pastor, my boss, my sister, and I love her. So many times when I can't say anything, or she can't, we just hang on to each other. We just hang on. When she needs to say something to me there's no untouched field that she can't talk about. I've had two great bosses, Rev. Elder Charlie Arehart, and Rev. Elder Nancy Wilson, and I've got a degree of honesty with those two that I don't have with anyone else."

SHAKING OFF DENIAL

From time to time, the staff and the church were reminded that their Assistant Pastor has AIDS. Rev. Wilson told ALERT, "Even when he's angry about his illness, he's honest about what he can or cannot do. Sometimes he's had to shake me out of denial. A year ago September, I was kind of cruising along when he said, 'I'm tired, really tired. I think I have about a year or so left. Sometimes I'm so tired I feel like dying.' That shook me to my roots. I listened deeply, and felt the sad-

(continued on page 2)

A Celebration of Life

(continued from page 1)

ness and grief. He took the wind out of my sails, but he said, 'My job is to see you're not left in the lurch. If you ever feel I'm not functioning, you tell me.' I've had tremendous *carte blanche* to say whatever I needed to, but he has often brought things up first."

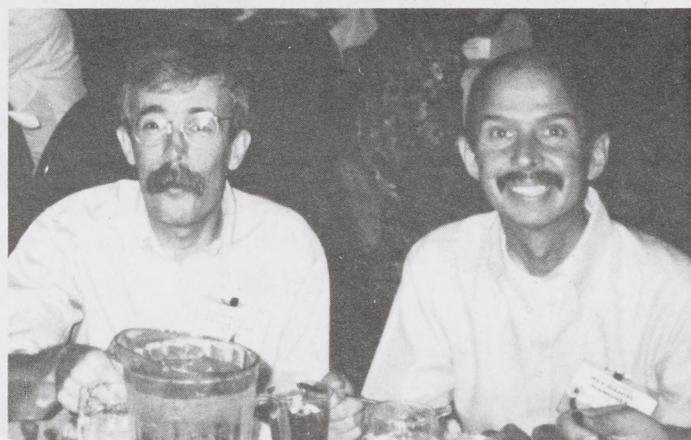
Dan became seriously ill near the beginning of 1993. Dan learned a lot from that experience. "God has a way of taking care of our fears. When I confronted death, I wasn't really aware of it. They found me face down in my corn flakes, and for three days I was in a coma in intensive care, and they didn't know why. I don't remember a thing."

Nancy remembers, "That was a time when we didn't think he'd be back, but then he did come back. It was a major readjustment for both him and us when he returned at Easter. He felt like he'd had a Rip Van Winkle experience. For instance, he discovered that Sandy Robinson (President of Samaritan College) had moved to Texas months before. He had to redefine his job because he had taught others to do the things he had done. He had to let them do it, and find new jobs for himself." Dan adds, "I've got a good volunteer staff that takes care of the daily needs of the church. I'm leaving a good administrative basis for the church, that can take the test of transition and not be dependent on one name. I want the church to be able to go from one person to the next without any glitches."

Rev. Mahoney has worked hard to achieve this stability. He knew it would be needed one day when it became time for him to let go. It began to be clear that the time had come for Dan to retire as Administrative Assistant Pastor as this summer went on. As Nancy tells it, "Dan has been sick off and on for almost a year. We have moved into our new offices, with new equipment and new demands. The demands on our office have really increased. Even with two trained office volunteers, we need a fulltime office administrator. Dan's been working ten hours a week since Easter. We made a contract with him for that, and it's really clear he's not going to be able to meet it or increase his time. In a few months, he might be able to, but that is not a secure option."

"While I was away on vacation [in August], Dan was in the hospital again, and he went through a depression, which was grief. He was grieving the loss of his job. I wasn't sure at first, because each grief has its specificity. I didn't get it. It hit him first. I was back from vacation, and the disorder in the office was more than it had been. The volunteer staff were stressed. I picked Dan up to come learn the new phone system. Then I knew this was the week. We met and talked, and we both knew it was time for the transition to take place. It was very hard for me. I had a week's delay in my reaction. At the church leadership retreat, Dan wasn't there, and it was hard for me. The retreat leaders gave me the opportunity to grieve. This is the end of an era."

Rev. Elder Wilson identifies denial as a major issue that she and the church have had to confront in dealing with Rev. Mahoney's situation. "We went into a kind of denial about it, and I had a crisis about that at the leadership retreat. I felt as if this is something I'm carrying, and we're not dealing with it publicly. My coming out of denial about it at the retreat popped out like the alien in the movies. I felt very alone; we're at a huge cataclysmic point, with this staff person who is chronically ill, and we're getting sucked into the silence!"



Rev. Dan Mahoney and his partner Patrick Weisenburger

THE TRANSITION BEGINS...

Rev. Wilson knew the next step was to notify the board about Dan's retirement. She relates, "The board had a huge reaction. On the one hand, they've been hovering around, saying we know we need more help. They've been trying not to say 'You need to move on this.' There was lots of ambivalence. When I announced it, I asked for a motion to accept Dan's retirement from this position, and they sat there. They sat there, and I just let them. I said that it's important to feel your feelings." Rev. Dr. Lori Dick arrived at the meeting at that point, and her presence helped give permission to share stories about Dan. Nancy continues, "The story-telling helped release some feeling. The whole thing took fifteen minutes just to make a motion. I don't feel so crazy now. I had felt very alone, and was not talking about HIV, or Dan, or any of it."

Now that the board has accepted his retirement, and Rev. Wilson has announced it from the pulpit, the transition has begun. Rev. Mahoney told ALERT, "It's been difficult the last couple of weeks. But I'm starting to get stronger. I'm feeling more encouraged. You can have these days where you feel wonderful, and want to get in there and kick butt, but it snakes away from you. You have to keep yourself on an even keel. What it is today is not what it is tomorrow. You have to keep yourself in balance."

Dan will continue his ministry as Assistant Pastor at MCC Los Angeles. He states, "No second best for Jesus. I have always honored my Savior. I've always tried to do my best, including administration. If we as people living with AIDS strive to make our transitions easier, simpler for the church, that would be a godsend. Don't be scared of it. It's a part of life as we see it now. It's going to be with us for awhile longer. It's there."

Dan continues, "It doesn't have to be a heart-breaking process. It can be one of Christian joy, in the way we celebrate, truly celebrate, each other's lives. I've seen people born into, live in, and die in and be buried in MCC. We're seeing a complete cycle of life. It can be a wholesome and right thing, not just a painful thing. There's joy to be had here. I've struggled for eight years, and I think I've done a good job. Not all of it is struggle, some of it is joy."

"I would have been dead a long time ago without my sweet, precious Jesus. Because of the church, I've lived longer because I've had a challenge. They chose not to let me slip away. I've accomplished my dreams. I'm completed. And Nancy's not going to allow me to feel no purpose."

(continued on page 3)

UFMCC AIDS Ministry Sends Churches World AIDS Day Packets

UFMCC AIDS Ministry is pleased to distribute World AIDS Day packets to each of the 300 MCC's around the world. Each church will receive a collection of liturgies written by the Rev. Lou Kavar and the Rev. Steve Pieters. To receive a World AIDS Day Action Kit write to: Association for World Health, 1129 - 20th St., NW, Ste 400, Washington, DC 20036.

The Action Kit includes a World AIDS Day Resource Booklet and a World AIDS Day Poster. The Resource Booklet contains updated information on AIDS around the globe,

suggestions for planning World AIDS Day Observances and on-going HIV/AIDS programs, publicity and media strategies, as well as other resources for networking.

The liturgies include a Healing Service and a Community Memorial service written by Rev. Pieters, and a World AIDS Day observance by Rev. Kavar. Also included is a Small Group Advent series on HIV/AIDS written by Rev. Kavar, and a hymn written by Rev. Grant Ford.

World AIDS Day is observed around the globe each year on December 1. ▼

Computerized AIDS Ministries Network — A Free Call By Modem

CAM, the Computerized AIDS Ministries Resource Network, is now available. It is designed to provide a medium through which professionals may obtain current information and resources to assist in ministering to persons impacted by HIV disease. CAM also provides services that will help those engaged in HIV/AIDS ministries to interact with one another, thus providing mutual support and interchange of ideas and methods.

The CAM Network is a project of the Health and Welfare Ministries Program Department of the General Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church. You can access CAM through your personal computer by dialing 1-800-542-5921, a free phone call.

The parameters for your communications program should be set to no parity, 8 bit word length, 1 stop bit. Any common speed up to 9600 bits per second (bps) may be used.

The CAM Network has as its heart a bulletin Board system (BBS). A successful bulletin board service requires active rather than passive participation. Initially CAM has relatively limited information resources that they are working to enhance. On the other hand, you may also have information resources that should be shared with others in AIDS ministries. With CAM you can send a copy of materials you have produced (providing you have it on a computer file) by uploading your file(s) from your machine to CAM. This is the reverse of what you might usually do (download files from CAM to your machine), but this will allow the CAM information resources to grow more rapidly than if our office staff is solely responsible for providing information.

For further information, contact Rev. Charles Carnahan at the Health and Welfare Ministries Program Department, general board of Global Ministries, the United Methodist Church, Room 350, 475 Riverside Drive, New York, New York 10115. Phone: (212) 870-3909. FAX: (212) 870-3873. ▼

A Celebration of Life

(continued from page 2)

"DON'T GET SUCKED INTO THE SILENCE!"

Rev. Elder Wilson is very aware that the issues MCC Los Angeles are facing with Rev. Dan Mahoney are the same issues that have confronted and will confront many other churches. She warns, "Don't get sucked into the silence. We set the ground rules early. You have to be ready for things not to happen as planned. And there is a whole cycle of denial and silence. It doesn't matter how many times I've been through this, with every person I love, I go through it again. And the church has to go through it again, all or nothing."

Rev. Mahoney adds, "Seize the bull by the horns. Talk about it. See what the options are. This dying process can be difficult. We're all dying, that's the reality of life. Learn as much as possible about this illness and how it affects both men and women. Struggle to understand that just because an individual has HIV, that doesn't mean that they can't still perform the duties asked of them and never assume that they can't. Those assumptions are where we get in a lot of trouble, into hurtful territory. You start making up people's minds for them."

In reflecting on God's role in all this, Nancy says, "There's a lot of grace visible, in the sense of taking each other's humanness, feelings, and process into account, especially when we're not all feeling the same things at the same time. God is in each of those places at once. There's a sense of when the Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. Something about AIDS is about taking away all these wonderful people and gifts, but at the same time, it's about how much it has given. There's a sense of Christ-likeness, a kind of sense of reverence for this moment and this time in our lives. We all are trying to love each other as we're doing the best we can to deal with stress and anticipated loss."

"Through our faith, tragedy can be redeemed... There's joy to be had here!"

Dan states, "I'm closer to my God today than when I was seventeen and I said yes to the challenge to be a minister of the gospel, and I know what that means now: a lot of sacrifice, a lot of love, and a lot of my sweet, precious Jesus. My reality of life is to keep on keeping on, taking care of myself, sharing the church's joy, and working when I can. When my number's up, it's up. I want to be remembered as a giving person. I hope that I've left the church in better shape than when I came."

He has. And he's not done yet. Nancy likes to tell the story of how it broke Dan's heart because he wasn't strong enough to help move into the new offices over Labor Day weekend. He had been despondent over the summer that he wouldn't live to see the building finished. But on Labor Day, after most of the move had taken place, he was found there anyway, under the desks in the new office, plugging in the computers.

Dan states, "Through our faith, this tragedy can be redeemed. If we don't transform it, we're missing the mark. There's joy to be had here!" ▼

Rev. Jim Dykes Seeks Input in Development of Sydney HIV Clinic

The Rev. Jim Dykes, a retired clergy-person of the UFMCC, is overseeing the development of a new state-of-the-art HIV/AIDS unit at one of Australia's largest teaching hospitals, The Prince of Wales Hospital. He is seeking information to help in developing this clinic from other HIV/AIDS outpatient clinics around the world.

Rev. Dykes writes, "We have been given 3.5 million dollars for a capital works programme by the Federal government. This is to build a purpose built building on site at Prince of Wales hospital. There is a 14 acute care and 5 bed palliative care ward at the sibling hospital to Prince of Wales, The Prince Henry Hospital, which is going to be closed due to various political reasons. The 14 acute care and 5 bed palliative care units will be moved into this new building. The off-hospital ambulatory care site where I am now working

(The Albion Street Centre) will be moved to the new building also."

In Australia, all medical treatment for HIV/AIDS is free. Scripts cost at the most \$15 per prescription, which includes AZT, ddI, and ddC. The new centre will provide support for information, counseling, and procedures which cannot be performed in a general practitioner's office.

Rev. Dykes is trying to gather information on what kind of services are offered in out-patient (ambulatory care) facilities around the world. If you have front-line knowledge of what kind of services (medical, counseling, nutrition, research, and information, etc.) are available through an HIV/AIDS outpatient clinic in your area, please submit that information to: Rev. Jim N. Dykes, 150 Albion Street, Surry Hills 2010 Australia, or fax the information to Sydney, Australia, 332-4219. ▼

Nine U.S. Sites Selected For Study of Early Primary HIV Infection

Scientists at nine U.S. medical centers are looking for possible benefits of giving short-term, daily doses of AZT to people newly infected with HIV, in a trial sponsored by the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease (NIAID).

In particular, the trial focuses on whether AZT can delay the progression from primary HIV infection to the development of AIDS. Often described as an influenza-like illness, this early stage of infection usually occurs two to 12 weeks after the first exposure to HIV, while the virus reproduces rapidly in the body. Although the stage ends and the symptoms go away after several weeks, HIV remains and many years later can lead to full-blown AIDS.

Some 80 people older than 13 years will be enrolled in the trial, sponsored by the institute's Division of AIDS Treatment Initiative program. The nine sites are Bellevue Hospital in New York, NY; Broward General Medical Center in Los Angeles, CA; the Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Palo Alto, CA; Houston Clinical Research Network, Texas; Johns Hopkins School of Medicine in Baltimore, MD; Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas, Texas; and the University of Illinois in Chicago.

Participants will randomly receive either 1,000 milligrams of AZT or a placebo

daily for 24 weeks and then be followed to look for differences between the two groups. Specifically, the investigators will determine whether AZT slows the drop in CD4+ T cells.

Primary HIV infection is a complex illness that can have many symptoms. Almost all patients report a moderate to severe fever. Also, patients may experience other symptoms including rash, swollen lymph nodes, sore throat, muscle and joint aches, diarrhea, nausea, vomiting, severe headaches, and mouth ulcers. These symptoms usually disappear without specific treatment, even though patients remain infected with HIV.

Conventional HIV blood tests, which look for antibodies, cannot detect infection during the initial weeks. People don't form these antibodies until two to six months after infection. During enrollment screening, trial investigators are checking would-be participants with a blood test that looks for a protein part of HIV called p24. High, measurable levels of this protein usually are present in the blood during the first six weeks of HIV infection.

For more information on this or related studies, call 1-800-TRIALS-A (1-800-874-2572) from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m., ET. All calls are confidential. ▼

Newsletter for Lesbians with Lupus Begins Publication

Ms. L. Yvonne Barth of Abilene, TX, USA, has begun a newsletter for lesbians with lupus, called "The Honker." The name of the newsletter comes from Rev. Elder Jeri Ann Harvey, who explains, "Geese honk to encourage one another." The newsletter is an outreach of the Women's Secretariat of the South Central District of UFMCC.

"The Honker" was born out of Ms. Barth's attending the West Texas Spiritual Awareness Weekend (WTSAW) in Lubbock, TX. She writes, "The 'Honker' actually started being formed in Lubbock, TX, in 1992 when Rev. Steve Pieters came to WTSAW as the keynote speaker. Being a 'Person with Lupus,' I had reluctantly driven to Lubbock from Abilene for the weekend as I had had more than enough of hearing of PWA's and all of the concerns that brought into people's lives. God worked some understanding and some compassion into my heart that weekend and my attitude toward aids was transformed greatly. Rev. Pieters forever earned my respect and care when he gave me the experience of having lupus mentioned from the pulpit as a very vital health concern in our denomination along with the ever-present aids."

The newsletter includes facts about lupus, poetry, comics, inspirational pieces, word puzzles, and helpful hints for women with lupus.

To subscribe to "The Honker" or to submit articles or give your input, write to Ms. L. Yvonne Barth, 1902 Chestnut, Abilene, TX 79602. ▼

ALERT

ALERT is a monthly newsletter containing information on AIDS Legislation, Education, Research and Treatment. The Editor is Rev. Dr. A. Stephen Pieters. For more information, please write: ALERT, 5300 Santa Monica Blvd., #304, Los Angeles, CA 90029.